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Review of Foreign Policy is Needed

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A REVIEW OF FOREIGN POLICY IS NEEDED

Mr. President:

The Secretary of State has set in motion a review and reappraisal of the foreign policy of the United States. I do not know whether that was his intention when he gave an interview to a reporter for LIFE Magazine. It seems to me that if it were, he might have found a more appropriate method. If he wished to discuss the achievements of American foreign policy with the public, he had only to request an open hearing with the Committee on Foreign Relations. He had only to call a press conference or to ask for time on radio and television.

An article in LIFE Magazine -- with all due respect to that eminent publication -- is hardly the best way to lay before the country and the world an accurate picture of the inner workings of our foreign policy. Nor is it the best way to expose the inner workings of the mind of the Secretary of State -- if that was the intention -- especially since the article is not even over his signature. How is one to know at what point the Secretary's interpretation of events ends and that of the writer begins? No matter how able the LIFE writer, such an article was bound to produce violent reactions both at home and abroad. It has already had that effect and we have not yet seen nor heard the end of it.

Whatever the Secretary's intentions, and I have no doubt that they were honorable, one result is already apparent. The wheels of review with respect to American foreign policy have begun to turn both here and abroad. I regret that the review has begun in this roundabout and indirect fashion. I cannot say, however, that I am sorry that it has begun.
It is long past due.

It is past due because everywhere in the world situations are changing rapidly while our policies have drifted along in the unchanging pattern of the past. I do not quarrel with the fundamental quality of these past policies. Most of them, like the Marshall Plan for economic aid, military containment in Western Europe, and Point Four, were devised during a Democratic Administration with the help of Republicans like the present Secretary of State. They were bold, intelligent, and effective policies at the time they were established. They stemmed the tide of the Soviet advance towards the Middle East and in Western Europe. They prevented Communist totalitarianism from spilling over into the Western Pacific. In so doing, they served the interests and safeguarded the security of the United States. They achieved this without bringing on the atomic holocaust of World War III.

But a foreign policy effective once is not a foreign policy effective forever. For three years we have lived on borrowed time in foreign relations. We have been carried along; we have been supported by the momentum of the ideas and the strenuous efforts previously put forth.

I have searched the records and I have failed to find one major new approach to the situation abroad in the last three years. There is a Policy Planning Board in the Department of State whose function it is to lend creative direction to the conduct of foreign policy. Where is that direction? It has been conspicuous by its absence. There are advertising gimmicks; there are new
words; there are louder words which fewer and fewer people heed. But what
does it all add up to -- a continuance of policies devised long before the present
Administration took office, now dressed up in the "diplomacy of the brink."

When these policies were first established there was a strong
justification for them in the situations which existed abroad. A war of great
devastation, which had shaken free governments to their foundations had just
been concluded. The threat of Communist subversion and aggression to them
was immediate and overwhelming. If they had fallen before this totalitarian
onslaught, the danger that this country might suffer the same fate would have
been multiplied many times. It was in our national interest to act with economic
aid, with military assistance; and we so acted. The response of the American
people to the challenge to freedom from Communist totalitarianism was sensible,
determined and noble. So, too, was the reaction of the free nations of Europe.
They supported fully the leadership of the United States because our policies did
fit the situations which developed after World War II. They supported our leader­
ship because it was clearly and unequivocally directed to the preservation of
peace and human freedom -- not to World War III or the chaos which lies beyond.

In some respects, in some areas of the world, the problems today
are similar to those which confronted the previous Administration. When past
policies are employed, selectively and judiciously, to meet these problems, I
see no reason to oppose their continued use. But in many parts of the world
the situation has changed. New forces are on the march in Asia and Africa in
the wake of the Bandung Conference last year. A Soviet diplomatic offensive, spearheaded by Messrs. Krushchev and Bulganin, is in high gear in Asia and has jumped the wall of containment in the Middle East. The German and Japanese situations are in a perceptible transition. North Africa is in turmoil, and the repercussions push France closer and closer to political disaster. Western Europe, groping towards unity, is in a decisive struggle at this moment with its inner forces of disunity.

Nothing has been settled in Korea. The off-shore islands may yet lead us into a military involvement with Communist China, if not to World War III itself. In Indochina, there has been some improvement but even there the danger of catastrophe is not yet passed.

Mr. President, all of these situations bear a direct or indirect relationship, a dangerous relationship, to the security of the United States and to the welfare of the American people. The relationship may not be as readily apparent, it may not seem as real as some of the domestic questions which we face, like the budget or lower taxes or better roads or the protection of our natural resources. But it is nonetheless real. Unless our foreign policies meet these international situations effectively they shall, sooner or later, exact from the people of your State and my State, from all the people of the United States, a terrible price, an inconceivably greater price than we have paid for past wars. In a nuclear age, the price shall be calculated not only in hundreds of billions of dollars but in the lives of countless millions of our citizens,
military and civilian alike. We shall deal with these international situations soberly and intelligently and well, or we shall leave a heritage of a shattered civilization to terror-stricken, haunted generations who will come after us.

In striving to meet the problems which confront us in the world, there is one factor which I believe we must bear constantly in mind. It is the factor of our own limitations. Despite their importance to us, situations elsewhere are not completely within our control. What we do or fail to do with respect to any one of them is only one factor. We may do all that we are capable of doing and still find that they work out against our immediate interests.

There are human limitations and they are just as applicable in foreign relations as in any other field of human endeavor. I do not believe the policy-makers have always appreciated that factor. In their anxiety to do something, they have often fallen into the erroneous assumption that dollars are the answer or a better Voice of America or more military aid, or this, that, or the other. There are no panaceas. Gimmicks, no matter how clever, are rarely the answer. There are times when to do less is better than to do more.

That there are limitations on what our influence abroad is, does not, however, excuse those responsible for the conduct of foreign policy from doing everything possible to make it most effective. The limitations are not an invitation to irresponsible drift, dodge, or defeatism, just as they are not a sanction for persisting in policies -- even those conceived under a Democratic Administration -- which may have become outdated.
In some situations these policies are still useful and are still necessary to the interests of the United States. In others, they are less effective or no longer effective and may even have become detrimental to our interests.

What we need, what the American people need, is a clear-cut honest understanding of the actual situations which confront us in various parts of the world and the policies which we are pursuing in dealing with them. We need to determine, the American people need to know, whether these policies are indeed the most effective available to us.

That is why I welcome the initiative of the Secretary of State in touching off a review of foreign policy by his interview in LIFE Magazine, much as I differ with the propriety of the means he has chosen or with his interpretation of recent history. General Ridgway's article in the SATURDAY EVENING POST has raised other questions involving the capacity of the armed forces to meet the commitments of policy which we have undertaken. These questions, too, will need to be examined. Let me say at this point that there is a great deal of difference in the propriety of a former Chief of Staff or even an ex-Secretary of State setting forth their views in an informal fashion and the present incumbents doing the same. In the case of former officials, they speak for themselves alone. What this Administration has yet to learn is that when its officials speak, they speak for the entire nation. Nor does it help matters for the President to issue disclaimers after the words of his subordinates, civilian and military alike, have done the damage.
I think this review of policy which has now begun should proceed not only in the Executive Branch, but in Congress -- particularly in the Senate -- and in the country at large. Some will say that an election year is not the time for it. They will say that under the pressure of politics, "bi-partisanship" will give way. If "bi-partisanship" means anything, it means the exercise of political restraint in matters which affect the vital interests of the nation. It is not a device to club political parties into submissive speechlessness. It is not a muzzle which requires Congress -- which requires the Senate -- to remain silent while situations are allowed to develop abroad which threaten the peace and welfare of the nation.

I have been for a long time deeply disturbed by the tendency over the past three years on the part of the Executive Branch to abdicate or evade its duties in foreign relations. I have more than once spoken out on this phenomenon and in defense of the prerogatives of the President. I should be equally disturbed however, if under the guise of "bi-partisanship", the Senate were expected to abandon its constitutional responsibility in matters of foreign policy.

The national interest will not be served in the Senate or elsewhere by a bi-partisanship of silence when international developments demand discussion. It will be served only by the acceptance of that added measure of responsibility which rests on each of us in the Executive Branch, in the Congress, and in the country at large in questions involving the relationships of this country to others. It is the responsibility to think and to act as Americans rather than as Democrats.
or Republicans. That responsibility is with us at all times no more, no less in an election year than in any other.

A Republican majority controls the Administration. A Democratic majority is in control of Congress. Let the Republican majority act with a sense of responsibility in this election year; the Democrats will do the same. The record of this body during the past year bears that out. The Senate has functioned under the outstanding leadership of the Senator from Texas (Mr. Johnson) and the Committee on Foreign Relations under the chairmanship of the esteemed Senator from Georgia (Mr. George). I can think of no measure of major importance in foreign relations, sought by the President, which has been denied him by action of the Democratic majority in this Congress or by the Democratic minority in the last Congress. I can think of several which were saved for him by action from this side of the aisle.

Recently, within a 30-day period, several incidents have occurred which throw doubt on the capacity of the Administration to operate with the same sense of responsibility. On December 31, 1955 Congressional leaders of both parties were summoned to the White House from their homes to be consulted and briefed on the budget for foreign aid for the coming year. They were told by the Secretary of State that additional funds would be sought for economic aid. But they were told nothing of any anticipated increase in military aid by the Secretary of Defense. Two days later, after the Congressional leaders returned to their homes, the newspapers carried the story that Secretary Wilson would seek $2 billion in additional military assistance.
Not long after this we learned through the newspapers, and then in
the President's message, that the Administration intended to put foreign aid on
a permanent long-term basis. What Congressional leaders were consulted on
these plans?

Then came the LIFE Magazine story sanctioned by the Secretary
of State which extolls the achievements of a Republican Administration in foreign
policy in a partisan publication in an election year.

These incidents, Mr. President, are, in my opinion, examples of
how not to act with a sense of responsibility in foreign relations.

And others seem to be coming. More and more Administration
leaders are getting into the political game in foreign relations and we are now
even promised the spectacle of the Secretary of State "taking the stump".

If national interest requires us to rise above political considerations
in matters of foreign policy, it also requires us to undertake a vigorous review
of that policy. It requires us to make an unremitting search for facts and ideas
which may guide us in dealing with difficulties abroad. Nowhere is this more
essential than in the Senate of the United States. Unless the search goes on
continuously in this body, how are we to discharge our constitutional duty of
"advice and consent" in foreign relations? The Senate's role in foreign relations,
no less than the President's is not a right; it is not a privilege; it is a constitu-
tional obligation which cannot be abandoned for any reason whatsoever without
undermining the foundations of our system of government.
For my part, I intend to raise the issues of foreign policy on the floor at intervals throughout this session. I hope to do so in the spirit of national responsibility and without challenging the integrity or the patriotism of any individual or the political party now in control of the Executive Branch of the government. I will be only too glad to give credit, where credit is due. By the same token, however, I do not propose to ignore or to gloss over the shortcomings, weaknesses, and inadequacies of foreign policy as I see them.

Within the next week or two, I expect to examine on the floor of the Senate the situation in Southeast Asia. At appropriate intervals thereafter, I intend to raise for discussion, in turn, the growing crisis in Western Europe, the problem of North Africa, of Latin America, of the Far East, and other areas of the world. My purpose in doing so is not to criticize for the sake of criticism, but to seek to understand and, where possible, to try to contribute to an improvement in the course which we are now following.

The Senate's role is to advise as well as to consent in foreign policy, and this Administration is deeply in need of advice. Many of us have travelled abroad in recent months. We have had an opportunity to keep up with developments through the press. All of us, and the Executive Branch as well, should profit from a free and frank discussion of these developments. We might help, at the same time, to clarify the understanding of the American people as to the issues which confront us abroad.
Out of this review could come new ideas to fill the vacuum, to stop the dangerous drift which has settled over our foreign policy. We are in danger of finding ourselves pursuing ever more feverishly a policy with fewer and fewer understandable objectives, a policy stricken with a poverty of ideas.

The challenge to the Senate and to all of us, as Americans, is to clarify our objectives in foreign policy and to end the poverty of ideas by which we pursue them.